

Executive Summary for Trinity International Diabetes Project

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Diabetes is one of the leading health concerns in the Marshall Islands. It is a major cause of death and disability and contributes to high medical costs for the treatment of complications such as amputations. Complications of diabetes are preventable and recent studies prove that diabetes itself can be prevented or delayed. For these reasons, Trinity Health International is committed to addressing diabetes in the 177 Health Care Plan.

A team of three diabetes specialists including a nurse and two dietitians was brought to the Marshall Islands to assess the current medical care and self-management of diabetes on one of four outer islands serviced by the 177 Health Care Plan. The team was to identify resources; meet with key groups; test some interventions; and present recommendations.

The team met with health and community organizations that serve the Pacific Island region, the Marshall Islands, and the island of Mejjatto. Conversations took place with government officials, organization leaders, and community members. These discussions were critical to the success of the assessment project. Resources were identified that can be used for diabetes education and awareness activities. Some materials are available written in the Marshallese language. Offers of assistance came from groups to help with translation and provide education materials to the outer islands. This project was seen as an opportunity by the Pacific Diabetes Education Program and the Marshall Islands Diabetes Prevention and Control Program as a partnership that will assist them in extending their services to the outer islands.

While on Mejjatto, the team was able to meet with local government representatives, school staff and children, church leaders, community groups, and the dispensary staff. Two 177 Health Care Plan physicians and a health assistant/translator accompanied the consultant team and were valuable in the dialogues that took place with the community and with individual patients.

The week on Mejjatto gave the team an opportunity to evaluate the clinic procedures for the management of diabetes and to field test a new product that can be used in clinics to assess blood sugar levels in diabetes patients. Classes on healthy eating and foot care were well attended. Mejjatto residents responded by participating in the clinic visits, in the classes and teaching the team about the local foods and traditional cooking methods. Several recommendations are included in the final report based on the team's experience and observations in the diabetes clinics.

The recommendations address the medical standards of care for diabetes patients and include clinical tools to assist in the documentation and monitoring of patient care. Opportunities exist for partnering with organizations on Majuro to offer training programs that can enhance self-management of diabetes and other chronic diseases. These "train the trainer" programs are evidence-based and would ensure continuity and sustainability of self-management education.

Through collaboration with the many excellent health education resources in the Marshall Islands, people with diabetes can live healthy, productive lives. For those who are at risk for diabetes, primary prevention of diabetes is a goal that can be achieved.